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American Reliance on Air Power

Americans have a romance with air, they utilised air balloon in their civil war and later in 1899¹ conference at Haig it was again an American Captain Crozier who resisted the idea of including air balloons as part of arms control and finally it was two Americans who became the first human to fly heavier than air machine. The first WW highlighted the third dimension domination and subsequently Italian Giulio Douhett and American Billy Mitchell propagated its all out use in future. What American Admiral Mahan had been stressing in late 19th century that a strong navy is essential for American domination of the world was altered by Mitchell who prophesised 'sea power is almost a thing of past....more economical and effective aircraft has become a symbol of national power'². This was validated by the strategic bombing of WW2 and finally the collapse of Japan through the use of nuclear weapon dropped from air. However the debate that whether airpower alone can win any war raged till the end of cold war during which America engaged in a multiple of military activity, the Berlin air lift, Korea and Vietnam, yet Americans failed to achieve an outright victory in any of these conflicts. In mid seventies and early eighties the idea of air land battle was envisaged by the Pentagon which centred around European theatre, it conveyed a joint co-ordinated attack utilising air force and army on a narrow front.

Purely from academic point its difficult to decide what airpower represents in case of America, because its military system is different from rest of world military, its army has more aircraft than air force, navy has fourteen aircraft carrier groups, marines has own aircraft the F-18s, both navy and air force possessed cruise missiles, Central command explains airpower as air campaign in which 'cruise missiles, fighters, and bombers are utilised'³ thus it includes USN, US marines, and USAF but excludes the use of army and this paper will revolve around the scarlet thread of whether airpower has become a tool for implementation of USA policy around the globe especially after the end of cold war.

The first gulf war which started with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990 was the first major challenge for the American military after the debacle of Vietnam, which had altered the American strategic culture fundamentally in a sense that human casualties especially of American souls became paramount and no political party could survive a term who suffered such. Iraq in August 1990 was in a position after capturing Kuwait to invade Saudi Arabia and become master of worlds 20% of oil thus the first action of President George Bush was to send 48 F-15C⁴ air superiority fighters from Virginia to Dahrn, they took almost fifteen hours to reach there where as the navy stated they need almost fifteen days to do so. The arrival of American aircraft gave an assurance to the allies that America is with them and that was possible through the air power. By 23 August there were over 437 USA⁵ aircraft in the theatre which later peaked over 1000. The heavy American ground forces started arriving in the theatre by end October 1990 although the lead elements of 82nd airborne division were in position by 8th August. This was the turning point in the American military history, had the Iraqi decided to invade the Saudi Arabia the overall complexion of the war

¹ Lee Kennet, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, {New York, Free Press, 1991}, p, 2.

² Mitchell Billy 'Winged Warfare in the Roots of Strategy' ed by David Jablonsky, [Mechanicburg, Stackpole, 1999], pp 417-442.

³ Michael Delong, *Inside Centcom, The Unvarnished Truth about the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* [Washington, Regnery, 2004], p, 82.

⁴ Robert Citino, *Blitzkrieg To Desert Storm*, [Kansas, University of Kansas, 2004], P, 277.

⁵ Ibid, p, 215.

might have been different but it was the air power that held them back and when air campaign started on 17th January 1991 in first few hours the American led air armada destroyed the command and control structures of Iraq and it lasted till 26th February when ground forces moved and ended the campaign in 100 hours with less than a platoon casualties in a over half million army.

The B-52 bombers hit Iraqi republican guards every hour, twenty four hours a day for entire war. The coalition flew over 110,000 sorties through 3380 aircraft, they flew 2388 sorties on the first night, hitting over 400 targets, 210,000 unguided bombs were dropped, 9342 laser guided bombs and 5448 surface to air missile, 2039 anti radiation missiles and 333 cruise missiles were fired coalition lost 47 aircraft and 21 helicopters⁶. The air force had virtually reduced the Iraqi forces to a level where Saddam accepted the initial American terms but resisted to leave his equipment in Kuwait and for that the ground war was conducted. Congress in December 1990 was told to be ready to face up to 100 aircraft loss in 20,000 sorties because Iraq had over 700 combat aircraft and over 11000 missiles and 8500 anti aircraft guns and Baghdad was more protected than any target in Eastern Europe but in the end there were less than 300 American casualties none from USAF.

It was monumental affair not many of the world population had seen war especially the post Vietnam generation and post WW2 generation in Europe and same holds true for middle eastern and Asian for the fact that by this time world had become a global village thanks to the satellite and information technology where people of all shades of life followed this war minute by minute, they saw the laser bomb penetrating through the ventilation shaft of Iraqi national defence centre thus blinding the Iraqi forces⁷. The war according to Clausewitz must have an aim and that aim is peace thus USA president and commander in chief has to weigh the balance between policy and war, air war thus presented that ability that represents instant reaction and affirmation of words spoken and not merely bluff and acts as a coercion fact on the intended states.

America had always tried to portray itself as the righteous nation where real politics has been shrouded into vanity but the clout of nuclear bombing and napalm bombing during Vietnam had polluted this image and this picture is more strong and vivid in under developing states, therefore this air power of precision, lethality but sparing civilians and subsequently giving the evidence in the form of almost live chain of events helped a lot in public relation. There were already wide spread demonstration across Asia against this invasion in Pakistan the newly elected democratic government was about to collapse due to difference with army chief on supporting the USA, similar was the state in Jordan and Egypt.

On military side the role of air power is debatable, on one hand it was air power that kept knocking out the Republican guards yet in the end it was the equipment of Iraqi army that caused coalition invasion. One major fundamental academic and doctrinal aspect was brought out by USAF General Horner, highlighting the terminology of tactical, operational and strategy 'To airman it is meaningless... Airpower is essentially very simple aircraft can hit target with precision quickly and over a wide area'⁸. This was a dramatic change from the traditional concept of tactical and strategic air force. The heavy bombers like B-52G and F-117 operated from Diego Garcia where as all other fighters, tactical fighter-bombers, air superiority, air borne electronic, air borne early warning aircraft that numbered over three thousand operated from Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The munitions for over 500 hundred USAF aircraft in the instant reaction was transported by air force itself in its C-5. It became clear that airpower is not merely fighter or bombers but also to have their own aerial fuel tanker like KC-135, electronic command centre like E3 AWACs. Use of bases in Turkey like Incerlik made it possible to attack Iraq simultaneously from north and south.

⁶ Tony Mason, *Air Power A Centennial Appraisal*, [London, Brassey's, 1997], Pp, 163-165.

⁷ Citino, *Blitzkrieg*, p, 282.

⁸ Ibid., p, 282.

This Gulf war became an evolution in military affairs, the world has not seen a superpower in a major war, the impact of technology was felt as it was felt in WW2 in the shape of radar so was global positioning system {GPS}. War basically reflects the strategic military culture of a nation and this air power became the symbol of that culture, a symbol of technology along with a dash of romance and chivalry. Aviators are a different breed 'I guess we are considered ourselves a different breed of cat, right in the beginning. We flew through the air and other people walked on the ground: it was as simple as that' – famous American aviator General Spaatz⁹.

The reliance of America on air power is also related to the development of computer in 1970's with the advent of Microsoft in 1977 the USA was ushered into a new era and this technology offered most to the aircraft and related weapons, Airpower is not just a bomber or hundreds of bombers it envisaged multiple functions ranging from electronic warfare to silence the surface to air missiles, jamming, precision munitions guided weapons and certainly the improvement in aircraft itself where fly by wire and head up display technology became an integral part. Air power is also closely related to the American social pattern of eighties where poverty was touching unprecedented limits the ethnic and demographic balance of the country has been misbalanced and among all these the only ray of hope and pride was aircraft and air power apart from space program, the space shuttles flights are part of that image of air and space superiority. which is in fact just true.

Small Wars of Peace. America after the first gulf war took part in small wars of peace like in Somalia {1992} Bosnia {1991} and Kosovo {1999} although from military point of view there is nothing new in them except that they highlighted the tension among four services about the role which they had to play, in Bosnia the USAF pressed for a role but debated by navy and army¹⁰ where in classic term this was marines domain thus policy suffered because of inter service rivalry which is not a new thing at all. Still it was the air power in the shape of USAF A-10, USAN F-15 and Marines F-18 in Bosnia that conveyed the action. Kosovo was a slightly different affair as USAF lost a F-117 in the conflict and downing of its pilots captured a wide audience in home. This romance with air is not new and it glamorises the war itself, the downing of pilot is always different for media as compared to a foot soldier, the role of media also acted as catalyst in fermenting the image of American power through airpower. Further in 1992 the American armed forces underwent massive reduction with over half million being demobilised the economy was spending almost 400 billion \$ on defence thus air power emerged as the logical answer as it was in early 1920s for the European powers to control the empire through air policing. The success of 1990 now became a set piece remedy for everything and thus in American culture instead of diplomacy the use of violence became the norm and employment of aircraft its tool, this shift towards coercion by the America was direct result of air power.

By the time 9/11 happened this strategic culture had taken its roots, it is possible to satisfy people and policy through the use of air power as it almost eliminates the risk of casualties to American soldiers the only friction was among air powers within military, as it was distributed among the services. The first reaction of action to 9/11 was nothing other than the airpower, Pakistan was coerced to agree to all seven conditions that Bush administration set or faced being bombed to stone age¹¹, this was airpower at its best it has coerced a state without firing any round.

⁹ James Tate, *The Army and its Air Corps, Army Policy Towards Aviation, 1918-1941* {Honolulu, University Press Pacific, 2003}, p.1.

¹⁰ Tony Mason, *Air Power A Centennial Appraisal*, [London, Brassey's, 1997], pp.172-175.

¹¹ Pervez Musharraf, *In The Line Of Fire, A Memoir*, {London, Simon & Schuster, 2006}, pp.201-207.

Afghan war or capitulation of Taliban was in fact a repetition of Gulf War, in this case the Taliban did not had any anti aircraft weapon other than few stingers and few anti aircraft guns. The air campaign or rather bombing started on 7th October 2001, In the first 76 days of operations till 23 December 2001, when sustained air operations slowed, the US flew about 6,500 strike missions over Afghanistan. About 17,500 munitions were expended on over 120 fixed target complexes and over 400 vehicles and artillery guns. A total of 57 percent of the weapons delivered were precision guided. Navy carrier-based planes flew 4,900 of the 6,500 strike sorties or 75 percent of the total. The Air Force, flying 25 percent of the sorties, delivered 12,900 weapons, over 70 percent of the total delivered¹².

America does not rely upon preliminary airpower alone as a necessity to bring its enemies to their knees this was the verdict of Iraq invasion in 2003 where in a classical WW 2 pattern the armour and airpower roared together which is now described as 'Shock And Awe' shock in lethality and awesome in precision. The plan of General Tommy Franks called for surprise and the perception even among top military brass of USA that an 'air campaign' has to be there before the army campaign. The inter service rivalries also plays its role and that is not something peculiar to USA but it is almost similar in all military establishment only USA has one more in the form of marines. And this plan worked as it takes away the initiate from enemy whereas the air campaign demands a prolong time period and political events can reverse in that period. The war started with two F-117 dropping their two two thousand laser guided munitions right through the depth of Saddam Hussain German made concrete bunker and then throughout the next ten days it was a display of precision bombing where damage was done temporarily and not permanent ,the Centcom stated that they can drop bomb through a window without damaging the other room.

Enduring Freedom

is the code name of the ongoing operation of America against the terrorist who launched the successful and most lethal attack on American soil in its living memory and also in written history. Repercussions had to be there and they had to be quick and a lesson for all to know . 'We may be the only one left in this war, that's ok with me , we are Americans' President George Bush after the attacks commented¹³,this much Bush was sure that is Osama Bin laden and his Al-Qaeeda behind this attack but he did not had the proof and neither he needed one at this time, he wanted him out dead or alive. Osama was in Afghanistan a land locked country ,barren, desolate about the size of Bush home state Texas. Afghan are to some historians the 12th lost tribe of Moses. Present day Afghanistan took birth as an after shoot of Great Game when British after suffering the most devastating defeat in military history when only one survived out of a force of 16000 in 1839 and later again suffering similar fate in 1879 finally relinquished their claim and demarcated the Indian subcontinent into Afghanistan and British India with a 'Durand Line' running on the crest of mountains, naturally tribes never accepted and neither respected it.

There are twelve major tribes who lived on the eastern border more famous are Afridis, Khattaks, Shinwaris, Mohmand, Mahsuds, Wazirs and Orakzai. They are pashtun by ethnicity and these pashtuns are about 20 million in number¹⁴{9 million in Afghanistan and other in Pakistan} the other major ethnic group of Afghanistan are the northern tribes who are Uzbek and,Tajik they differ in appearance from pashtun as they have more mongol blood line, the binding factor is the religion Islam in which they are again having varying difference, the northerners having moderate view and pashtuns having extremist view point. Soviet Union tried to cultivate Marxist ideas in Afghanistan in 1979 and later invaded as well with over 85000 troops but retreated after eight years and having suffered 55000 casualties thanks

¹² Operation Enduring Freedom <<http://www.wikipedia.org/>> {accessed 3-16 March 2009}

¹³ Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, { New York, Simon & Schuster,2002},p,81.

¹⁴ Angel Rabasa,Cheryl Bernard,Peter Chalk{ Arlington,Rand,2004},pp,286-293

mainly to American military aid to tenacious afghans and their brethren Arabs mujahedeen for whom it was a religious war the Jihad. After soviet departure the tribes fought among each other and finally in 1994 the student 'Taliban' revolution took place in which the veteran front line Mujahedeen who were now mainly spending life in an anarchic environments by teaching religion to orphans' of the war in the Pashtun tribes led by one eyed Mullah Omar of Kandhar and his close mujahedeen who almost all had lost either a leg or hand in Jihad started the drive and within three months they virtually had the half of Afghanistan under their control. And by 2001 were in control of whole except a valley under northern tribe.

Laden is probably the most romantic rebel, guerrilla, terrorist of all time, he seems to be reincarnation of 12th century Hasan bin Sabah and his assassins. Laden was twenty six and a billionaire¹⁵ when he came to Peshawar from Saudi Arabia {the way Che Guerra went to Bolivia} and soon Osama became the most fierce fighter followed maniacally especially by his Arabs and other Mujahedeen's. After the war Osama soon became disillusioned with Afghan civil war and also of Saudi royal family and settled in Yemen from where he conducted a series of spectacular attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and than migrated to Afghanistan now under Taliban.

Mullah Omar demanded a proof from Bush later however Omar agreed to put Osama on an open court of international justice, both demand rejected by Bush. Between 11th September- 7th October 2001 the Central Command of America {Centcom} under whose area of operation Afghanistan falls carried out all appreciation and put forward three plans¹⁶, the first one calls for destruction through air power only but finally the presence of ground troops and destruction using air power was approved.

Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld admitted 'the hard fact was that America could not operate in Afghanistan without having allies'¹⁷ The fact was Afghanistan was not a country at all, there were no target to be hit as in conventional states or as in Iraq. President Bush remarked 'whats the fun in hitting a \$ 10 tent with \$ 200 million worth cruise missile'¹⁸. There was no electricity, command and control centres, air defence weapons, telecommunication etc what little was there it was not affecting anything, what was present on ground were 60,000 Taliban, a thousand of Osama Arab warriors and potential million pasthuns in tribes all ready to wage another war.

A quick glance through history confirmed Americans that Afghanistan is not a push over. All neighbouring countries were coerced like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Pakistan into giving bases and all other support for which American paid and wrote off old loans. This is where a new way of warfare in American military history took birth. instead of simply landing the troops in Afghanistan or bombing it into rubble the Americans paid the northern alliance money to wage war against the talibans with their {USA} aerial support. It was a unique war where the first Americans to land were Central intelligence Agency field operatives followed by the special operation forces whose main task was to guide the American bombers to the target with the help of laser guided equipment. By 23rd December 2001 Kabul was captured by the Northern Alliance and soon American forces started landing in Afghanistan in numbers. Taliban simply fled to their stronghold in Kandhar and took refuge in mountains with Americans following hot on their heels supported by British and Northern Tribes. The Taliban and the wanted Laden escaped through the mountains towards the east and into eastern tribes of Pakistan. Some pitched battles and operations took place like 'Operation Anaconda' and heavy bombing in Tora Bora mountains.

Pakistan was coerced into deploying its almost two corps along the border to stop the Talibans fleeing and from this point onwards an intricate and delicate situation took birth. Pakistan denied Americans right to cross into its territory in hot pursuit of Talibans and rather took it self to hunt them down but Americans were not satisfied with this arrangements yet

¹⁵ Jason Burke, Al-Qaeda The True Story of Radical Islam, London, Penguin, 2004, pp 28-55

¹⁶ Michael Delong, Inside Centcom, The Unvarnished Truth About the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Washington, Regency, 2004, pp, 27-39

¹⁷ Bob Woodward, Plan of attack, London, Simon & Schuster, pp, 6-14,

¹⁸ Ibid

they conceded to Pakistan, for an outsider it looks extremely enigmatic that the biggest super power on god's earth is unable to chase the talibans and hunt them down in primitive mountains. The answer lies in following.

Pakistan is a nuclear state with a population of over 150 million with 97% Muslim and over 3 million Christians¹⁹, the biggest in an Islamic country, the country due to prolong military rules have become a nursery of radical Islam and ongoing guerrilla movement in Kashmir against India finally resulted in Indians amassing their forces on border in 2002 for a showdown with Pakistan. As soon as American bombing campaign started in Afghanistan there were wide spread mass demonstration in Pakistan although not as violent as expected. USA had the following option ,either to launch a ground operation from Afghanistan onto the tribal area and in ensuing expect high casualties, launch an air campaign for a prolong period during which the population might revolt against the existing friendly regime and finally USA could have allowed the India to launch the attack from the east and simultaneously itself launch attack on the tribes. But all these had catastrophic consequences thus USA adopted the same strategy as they adopted in initial routing of Taliban, they simply paid Pakistan to wage their war and simultaneously put the tribal area under aerial observation and conducted joint operations with Pakistan army. Americans trained Pakistan army into night vision fighting by providing helicopters {almost 40 Bell 412 and 20 cobras²⁰} and later training them in USA as well. New militia force was raised with American funding, intelligence was also shared.

Between 2002-2006 almost three hundred hard core Al-Qaeeda operatives have been arrested in Pakistan and over 80% of all wanted persons have been arrested in Pakistan by USA but all this has come at a very high price. From 2002 the attacks on Christian community started increasing in which church and schools were targeted, all foreign national became a target of suicide or kidnap attempts. In June 2002 eleven French engineers were killed in suicide attack and later American journalist Daniel pearl was butchered, Pakistan army itself became target of suicide attacks and one three star general has been killed and other has been injured apart from over 200 other all ranks killed in various attacks. A series of bomb and suicide attacks virtually paralysed the country and brought it to anarchy. The public support especially in tribal areas started increasing for the talibans, this was mainly due to the religious ties and also as a reaction of American operation in the tribal area, the Americans at times as in 2003 Bajour area operated and fired missile on suspected hideouts of Taliban in Pakistan territory which killed over a dozen civilian population.

America thus found itself in a catch-22 situation ,if they attack on suspected habitats in tribal area than they can face high casualties of their own troops and a possible repercussion and public lashing from Pakistan and if it goes unchecked than a coup or anarchy can take place, on the other hand if they simply allow Pakistan Army to carry out operation inside Pakistan on American intelligence than the results might take time, one additional factor was that almost all Al-Qaeeda members got underground in the major cities. Thus America opted for a combination of both ,it does not operate within Pakistan territory yet it violates airspace as and when required and it also allows Pakistan army and intelligence agencies to operate at their own.

Winning Heart and Mind. In October 2005 the Northern Areas of Pakistan were hit by a massive earthquake and Americans led the way in the biggest helicopter rescue relief operation in the history 'Operation Lifeline'²¹. In same year the Swat area of Pakistan underwent a radical change when people started an armed campaign to have Islamic laws in their territory and called themselves as 'Taliban' soon it became a full fledged armed resistance and employed a corps of Pakistan army. In December 2007 the Pakistan underwent a shock when twice premier Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a political rally by hardliners, for next three days there was no writ of state in Pakistan, later in elections the ex army chief and president Musharraf was defeated in parliamentary elections and soon

¹⁹ ,Angel, Muslim World, pp 254-256

²⁰ Azam and Cheema, History of Pakistan Army Aviation, Islamabad, Army Press, 2008, pp 348-378

²¹ Ibid, pp 400-412

democracy return to power. This presented new dilemma to USA as although it champions democracy yet it believes in rhetoric in this aspect as far as Islamic states are concerned because in true democratic state it is the will of people that has to be prevailed and people are generally against American policy. In 2009 the Pakistan made a compromise with the Taliban in the Swat area which is highly criticised in America.

Conclusion. America's war against terror has become a war against tribes of Pashtuns of HinduKush and apparently there seems to be no immediate remedy for this for the reason that there is a difference between extremism and terrorism as far as Islamic ideology is concerned. Pakistan the key player in this war has its own limitations, and Pakistan does affect the region's stability in a more drastic manner than the Iraq or Iran. The Chinese factor will play a key role and USA might have to face the Chinese if it decides to carry out any intervention in Pakistan. On the other hand the present state of affairs is not satisfactory from American perspective who desires and demand a more aggressive policy from Pakistan towards the Taliban. The Pakistan dilemma is that it cannot undertake operation against an ideology that is wide spreading along its western borders, it is already engaged in such counter insurgency operation since December 2001 and have suffered heavy casualties in tribal areas. Democracy has its own logics and one must respect them. Pakistan is now most volatile area in world, the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai and Lahore have again brought the fact into light that Al-Qaeeda and its sympathisers simply want a confrontation in the region, their aim and goal is that there should be a war involving Pakistan and they know any war now will be a nuclear one and they hope by this they will bring anarchy into Pakistan as war has brought it in Afghanistan and thus they will have more wider audience for their call. One major answer to all this is to rebuild Pakistan and all that money which America will be spending in any future conflict in the region should now be spend on economic and educational uplift, rather than spending later on rebuilding and most importantly the democratic institutions in Pakistan shall be protected at all cost

USA does not seem to be over reliant on airpower rather it has a flexible approach. The military system on land has remained unchanged in last three hundred years with fire power being the dominant factor and before air power it was artillery and now the same action is done through the use of air craft. Neither USA seems to be overly relying upon strategic bombing of WW2 or Vietnam pattern. In the post cold war conflicts USA has been unpredictable in the tactics and strategy, and this is the beauty of any military organisation. They were the first one to conduct a prolong air campaign in Gulf War and every one thought that this is now standard but they achieved surprised in Iraqi invasion by not adopting it in 2003 and there by achieving surprise. The reality of our time in term of warfare is in third dimension at least for those nations that can afford its cost and apparently it is USA at the moment which can afford it, others like Saudi Arabia or Korea can buy the American aircraft but they even cannot maintain them without American assistance thus America has a virtual monopoly over the third dimension and it depends upon them how well they use it, the world does not have any answer or remedy to this.

The wars that America have fought since end of Cold-War could all have been finished off with the airpower although it would have taken a little bit more time had that option being followed but the relationship between policy and war at times makes it necessary that airpower should be utilised and at others {Iraq 2003} it spelled that it should be finished off quickly before world opinion turns other way. Airpower has limitation, it is never used in full, it is bounded by ethics of warfare therefore the concept of avoiding civilian and collateral casualties generally turns airpower into a prolong saga, the weather is the biggest hurdle and unavoidable foe that has yet to be overcome. The new face of airpower in future involves remote control unmanned aerial vehicles 'Predator' which are controlled from thousand of miles and has removed 'fog of war' for the commanders.

The primary aim of any war was and will remain the destruction of enemy armed forces, its command and control, logistics and morale. For centuries humans were looking for suitable weapon that can destroy all of them simultaneously but to no avail, however with

present and forthcoming aerial armada of America along with its superior technology ,precision guided munitions and its desire to act as an imperial power protecting its commercial and ideological interest on global scale, there is no alternative than the air power and Americans have very rightly used it since 1990 because it is instant, cost effective, safe and lethal.